

1794
THE
S P E E C H
OF
SIR HERCULES LANGRISHE, BART.

ON THE MOTION OF

The Right Hon. W. B. PONSONBY,

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS OF IRELAND,

ON TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 1794,

FOR A

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

L O N D O N :

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1794.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IF there ever was a Speech that deserved to be universally read, and its contents attended to, it is that of Sir Hercules Langrishe, Bart. The publisher has therefore been induced to think, that the circulation of this interesting Speech may do an essential public service.

*Piccadilly,
March 18, 1794.*

SIR H. LANGRISHE began by observing, that he had so often and so recently pressed upon the House his sentiments on the subject of a Parliamentary Reform, as it is called, that he neither found himself inclined, nor did he think it would be justifiable, to take up much of their time on the present occasion; however, as he had always opposed this measure on general principles, as tending to shake the stability of a constitution which had been formed by the progressive wisdom of ages---as tending to detach the public mind from a veneration for an ancient establishment, and set it loose into the mazes of speculation and experiment, he could not prevail on himself to be altogether silent, when the temper of the times, and the condition of the surrounding world, furnished such new and important admonition on the subject. He objected to the agitation of the question at this time. He objected to this bill, as he did to the bill of the last session, because it led to an object, in his opinion, neither conducive to our freedom, nor compatible with our tranquillity: he objected to it because it justified the popular demand by conceding to the principles; and it disappoints the popular demand by the measure of its concession. He objected to the bill, as

it flatters requisition by the appearance of a victory, and embitters it by the acrimony of disappointment. The rash career and fatal consequences of a reforming spirit, have lately been brought before our view, by facts so striking and impressive, that what was formerly conjectured is now conviction; and if we will not profit by the example of others, we may possibly add to future misfortunes, the aggravation of self-reproach. Upon a former occasion, he had stated more at large than he should now add, the progress of reform in France, till reform became subversion; he had stated many things then as a prophet, which he might now state as an historian.

The progress is natural, and is applicable as a warning to every country in Europe; for there is so much of uniformity in the nature and proceedings of man, that in their combinations almost always similar causes produce similar effects; similar conditions, similar consequences; and therefore I do not hesitate to say, with every degree of respect and affection for the people, acting within their proper sphere, with every degree of conviction, that their happiness is the end and the object of every good government; I do not hesitate to say, that there never has been an instance, in any age or country, in which political power has been assumed by the lowest orders of the people---by those

those whose education is ignorance---whose condition is uncertainty---whose patrimony is hope---and whose empire must be commotion, which has not proved subversive of liberty, destructive of the general happiness, and peculiarly unfortunate to those who are the authors of it.

Let us not deceive ourselves by calling the calamity of France, *French Cruelty*—it is *French Anarchy*! dissolve but the ties that hold mankind together, dissolve but the restriction of laws, the obligations of religion, the mutual dependence and subordination of settled society, and man becomes as ferocious as the tyger in the forest. I do not adopt the philosophy of Mr. Hobbes, or any of the theorists, as to the original state of nature; I only speak of man breaking loose from the bonds of society, in which case the different dispositions and genius of different countries have always assimilated, and assimilated in ferocity. If the French have murdered their King, sacrificed their priests on their altars, and exterminated their best citizens, we cannot forget the banishment of Aristides, or the death of Socrates, or the ridiculous cruelty that banished Timotheus, only for adding four strings to the lyre. Popular domination has ever been cruel and unjust; and every friend to freedom and to order, to virtue and to happiness, should guard against its approaches with as much vigilance as we should guard the roads that lead to life or to death.

death. In the year 1789, the æra of the first reform in France, the elective franchise was ascertained, and confined to active citizens, men of certain qualifications, of age and property; this was the basis of their first great reform. But this reform was soon thought inadequate, as the Right Hon. Member's reform would soon be thought here. Concession proved but the parent of demand, and the redress of grievances, the approbation of discontent. The people felt success as a testimony of power, and began to speculate instead of to enjoy: they perceived that in their twenty-six millions of people there were not three millions of active citizens, and that the immediate electors were not in the proportion of one to an hundred of the people. The great majority of the people, who considered themselves the authors and the object of the reform, began to discover that they were unrepresented: "and being unrepresented, their new philosophy taught them that they were slaves, and that personal representation was necessary to liberty: and by the usual revolutionary expedients of clubs and conventions, and armed citizens, they speedily accomplished their object---an equal representation of *all* the people---and with that the democracy of France."

You see, Sir, that the temperate reform was the rudiments of all that followed; it was the first prize of political disquisition---it was the first trophy

trophy of popular success. However, it was not
 the end, but the means: it was the instrument,
 and not the object. And to shew you how
 rapid are the strides of innovation, when it is
 once set in motion, permit me to observe, that
 even the democracy of France was of short du-
 ration: it passed away like the whirlwind of the
 wilderness, desolating but transitory, and soon
 yielded, as every popular insurrection has ever
 done, to the predominant tyranny of some of
 the most contemptible of its leaders, who, how-
 ever, had the dexterity to "ride on the whirl-
 wind and direct the storm."—What then be-
 came of the fathers of temperate reform? What
 is the Duke de Rochefoucault---the Duke de
 Brissac---the eloquent Clermont Tonnerre---
 the learned and acute advocate, M. de Pascalis?
 They are no more! Neither their talents nor
 their virtues, nor the splendid rashness of their
 first enterprize, could atone for their subsequent
 moderation: they fell victims to the spirit of
 innovation which themselves had inspired.
 With such an example before your eyes, will
 you at this day talk of a temperate reform? Or
 do you imagine your temperate Bill, which, out
 of four millions of people, leave 3,800,000 peo-
 ple unrepresented (19 in 20 of the people): do
 you imagine it would satisfy this great majority
 of the people, whom it does not comprehend?
 No! no! you would only inspire their hopes,

whilst you disappoint their wishes, and animate their efforts by flattering their pretensions. The people who were clamorous for reform would despise your temperate plan, except only as one stage gained on the great career. I say, they would despise it, because they have said so themselves; they have over and over again demanded and defined their ultimatum of reform---“ An equal representation of all the people.” In the last session I gave you at large a detail of their requisitions on this subject, taken from the minutes of their associations, and their clubs, and their armed citizens, in which they have told you explicitly, “ they will not lay down their arms till they procure an equal representation of all the people:” and a recent publication by a society called United Irishmen, is not more explicit in the recommendation of their own plan, than in the contempt of yours. They tell you, “ they firmly believe Administration and Opposition are equally averse from the measure of adequate Reform.” They say, “ if they had no other reason for that opinion, the plan laid before Parliament in the last Session (the present Bill) under the auspices of Opposition, might convince them of the melancholy truth.” As to their own plan, they have given you a full and faithful delineation of it. It is founded on a decided principle, and goes to a decided purpose—Personal Representation detached from property

perty—Universal Suffrage and pure Democracy. He said he knew very well the Right Hon. Gentleman who proposed this measure, and the Hon. Gentlemen who associate with him in its support, have too great a stake in the country, too high a public character—too much of personal integrity, to suffer them to become accessory to such dangerous notions : at the same time, if they give the authority of partial concession to extravagant demand, they will find that neither their interests nor their character, respectable as I know they are, will have authority to repress its growth, or controul its excess. It is impossible to look into the peculiar situation of this country, and the condition of the world around us, without seeing that this is not the time to agitate questions of political experiment. We know that the most indefatigable industry has been employed to corrupt the minds of the people—to inspire them with new notions of Government, new models of Constitution, and new conditions of obedience. We know that innovation has been held out to the restless, commotion to the disaffected, and the poor have had the false gospel of Equality preached unto them—We know that the most populous Nation in Europe has declared hostilities against every settled Government existing—that they have added the force of enthusiasm to the fury of an unholy war ; a sort of anti-crusade, in which they bear the guillotine

guillotine against the cross, and, with the impetuosity of a spurious chivalry, endeavour to spread their arms and their infidelity all over the world. It is of little consequence to us, what species of government or anarchy they may choose for themselves, if they would keep it to themselves; but the liberality of their zeal disdains such monopoly;—they send out missionaries to propagate their doctrines; and in this country, as well as in Great Britain, they must have made some proselytes, because in every country there are many to be found, “*Quos ad perturbandam Republicam inopia atque mali mores stimulant.*”—And they further tell you, “that this invasion of your principles shall be followed by an invasion of your land.” We read in their public records, that the Minister of Justice proposes “a Committee of Insurrection, for the express purpose of overturning every Monarchy in Europe.” They vote “That the National Convention of France be a Committee of Insurrection against all the Kings in the Universe:” and they actually appoint a chosen band to be their assassins. They decree, in the name of the French Nation, “That they will assist every country who wish to recover their liberty;” and they charge the Executive Power, in a decree translated into all languages, “To give the Commanders of the French armies orders to protect the citizens of every country, who

may

may be disturbed or vexed for the cause of their liberty ;" inviting all nations who wish to recover their rights, " to apply to their Generals for assistance ;" which is, to solicit revolt in all countries. The perseverance of their activity was equal to the boldness of their principles ; and, in violation of their disclaim of conquest, they made Savoy an 84th department in France.

Is it then possible, that at this time, and under all the circumstances of the world, we should for a moment engage ourselves in problematical experiments, on a constitution which we know is competent to all the ends of civil liberty and progressive happiness ? That we should turn the minds of the people from the duties of a critical situation ? That we should, as it were, tamper with turbulence, and favour disquisitions which would make the people politicians instead of husbandmen ; and agitators instead of defenders of their country ? As to the objections to the bill itself, though I think them great and numerous, I yet think they are lost in the predominant objection to your agitating the question at all at this time.

As the bill is the bill of last session, in entering into the particulars, I should only repeat what I said before. I objected to it then, as I do now, that it is incompetent to the end proposed, and would be utterly unsatisfactory to the people it professes to gratify ; that it does not improve or
extend

extend the basis of representation ; that, on the contrary, it renders the representation of the people still more unequal—and that on the whole, it is a transfer of power, and not a reform of Parliament. And as to the House of Commons, constituted and composed as it is at present, although the waste of some places, and growth of others, must perpetually vary the proportions of its own constituency, I am yet bold to say, it is at this day an adequate representation of the property of the kingdom ; that in its proceedings you cannot trace any provocation to change it, because you know that for seven years past it has been engaged in the uniform practice, session after session, of adding some new protection to Constitutional Liberty—some new advancement to the prosperity of the country ; and that to hazard such progressive happiness in the lottery of experiment and adventure, would at all times be rashness, and at this time infatuation. Under such impressions, he said, he must naturally wish to put an end to the discussion ; and to do so in the manner most respectful to the Right Hon. Member, he should move, “ That the bill be read a second time on the 1st of August.”

This motion after a debate of considerable length was carried in the affirmative. —
Ayes, 142 ; noes, 44.

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